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ABSTRACT

The most significant findings and recommendations of the 1975 Oregon Statewide Reading Assessment are highlighted in this summary intended for a nontechnical audience. A criterion-referenced test was developed to test the reading achievement of fourth graders in the areas of word attack skills, comprehension skills, study skills and vocabulary skills. A statewide pilot test of reading was administered in 1974 and in 1975 a full-scale reading assessment was administered to a sample of 25 percent of Oregon's fourth graders. The results indicated that student performance was satisfactory or better on 18 out of 25 reading objectives. Students performed better in the areas of word attack and vocabulary skills than in the areas of comprehension and application-study skills. Groups which performed above the state average were students who had never failed a grade or been held back, students from the eastern region of the state, girls, and students less then ten years old. Most students who needed assistance in reading were receiving that help. (MKM)

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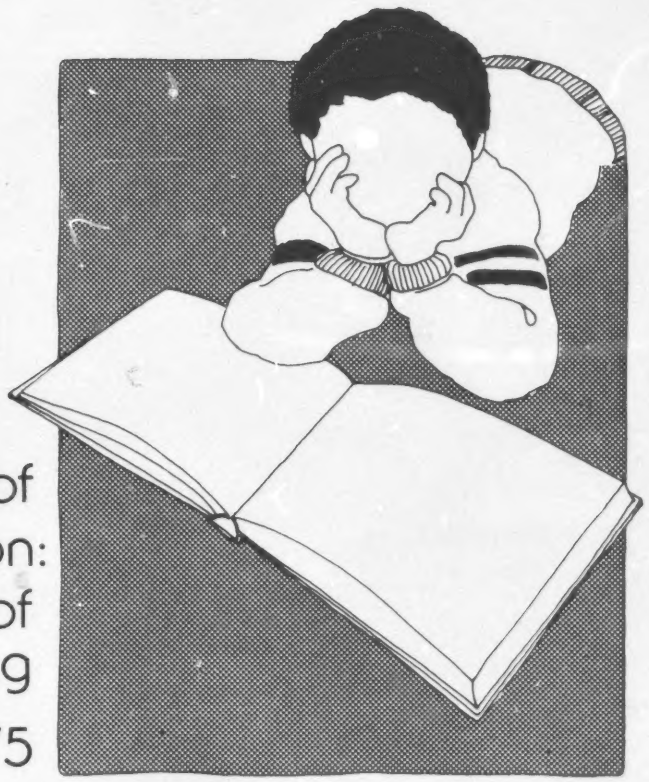

IMPACT of Oregon Education: an Assessment of Reading 1975

OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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December, 1975

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FOREWORD

In 1973 the Oregon Department of Education began implementing the Oregon Statewide Assessment Program to provide information upon which important educational decisions would be based. In April 1975 an assessment of reading skills was administered. Information from this and future assessments will ultimately lead to the improvement of learning opportunities for Oregon's students.

Over the past several years teachers, administrators, students and parents have become increasingly aware of the need to improve student performance in reading. Their reactions to the 1975 assessment results, presented in the form of conclusions and recommendations, form the basis for this report on how well Oregon's fourth graders are reading.

Objectives important for Oregon students have been measured by this assessment. The project is specifically designed to reflect concerns and goals which Oregon citizens regard as relevant to their children's education.

Developing an assessment program which successfully serves the needs of diverse audiences interested in improving Oregon education is a tremendous endeavor. The Department is pleased to present this year's assessment results for consideration by all concerned citizens.

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Can Oregon Fourth Grade Students Read?

According to the April 1975 statewide reading assessment, student performance was satisfactory or better on 18 out of 25 reading objectives Oregonians had identified as important. Students performed better in the areas of word attack and vocabulary skills than in the areas of comprehension and application skills.

Which groups performed above the state average?

- Students who had never failed a grade or been held back
- Students from the Eastern Region of the state
- Girls
- Students less than ten years old

Which groups performed below the state average?

- Participants in a compensatory education program for the disadvantaged (Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—ESEA)
- Students diagnosed as needing corrective/remedial work
- Students who had failed a grade or been held back
- Students from the Metropolitan Region of the state
- Those from a district of 7,500 or more students
- Members of minority groups

Some other important findings from this year's assessment:

- Most students who needed assistance in reading were receiving that help—through Title I or other special assistance programs, additional reading instruction time or through the assistance of aides and paraprofessionals.
- However, about 7 percent (approximately 2,400) of those Oregon fourth graders diagnosed by teachers or reading specialists as needing corrective/remedial work in reading were not receiving it.
- The majority of students diagnosed as needing corrective or remedial assistance *were* being diagnosed by classroom teachers, although students with the most severe reading problems were usually diagnosed by specialists. The performance data tended to indicate that teachers and specialists had accurately identified students who had a reading problem.
- In most cases, students from districts of 3,000 to 7,499 students had the highest performance.
- For some bilingual students, speaking a second language appeared to be related to having reading problems; performance of such students was well below the state average.
- The sex of the fourth grade reading teacher had no apparent effect on the reading performance of fourth graders.
- Students with the lowest performance were receiving the greatest amount of direct reading instruction per day, and were also the most likely to be participating in remedial or other special reading programs.
- About 54 percent of Oregon's fourth graders received one-half hour to one hour of direct reading instruction per day; about 39 percent received one to two hours.

What can be done to help those students for whom reading performance was low? Recommendations offered by a panel of Oregon educators and other citizens are summarized on page 9.

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I. BACKGROUND

In the early 1970's Oregon began to experience trends characteristic of education throughout the United States—a call for greater accountability, more citizen involvement in education, increasing diversity in expectations for education, and some tangible evidence that education was really fulfilling its role effectively. In response to the increasing demands generated by these trends, the State Board of Education adopted a planning and evaluation system in which regular, scheduled assessment of student performance would play a major part. Oregon's assessment program was to be marked by extensive citizen involvement—from the early stages of planning right through the review of results and formulation of recommendations.

In addition, assessment in Oregon would be goal-based, designed to measure how well Oregon schools were preparing students to fulfill each of six life roles:

- Learner
- Individual
- Consumer
- Producer
- Citizen
- Family Member

Assessment results provide Oregonians regular, up-to-date information on what progress has been made toward attaining important goals and what more remains to be done.

Oregon statewide assessment got its official start in 1973 when the state superintendent of public instruction and the state legislature requested information on student performance to assist them in making informed educational decisions. Although their questions and concerns were primary considerations in determining what data to collect, the assessment program was designed to serve a wide range of important and concerned audiences: the legislature, the State Board of Education, the Oregon Department of Education, members of professional organizations and commissions, local administrators, researchers, teachers, specialists, parents and other concerned citizens.

Much emphasis has been placed on seeing that members of these audiences have access to the assessment results. This *Executive Summary* is but one of a series of reports on the 1975 reading assessment available from the Department on request.

II. PROCEDURES

The planning which began in September 1973 proceeded through a statewide pilot test of reading in April 1974 and culminated in a full-scale reading assessment in April 1975. The following were vital steps in this process:

1. *The Early Decisions: What to Assess . . .*

   To determine how every Oregon student was performing in every subject would have been too costly—in terms of money as well as time and personal resources. Therefore, it was agreed to begin with the first goal area, *learner*, and to assess one subject within that goal area—*reading*.

2. *. . . And How to Assess*

   Many standardized reading tests were already on the market. But the Oregon citizens and educators who helped plan this assessment wanted to test objectives which were considered important in Oregon and reflected the state's goals and needs. Because no available test measured these objectives, an objective-referenced test was developed. In reviewing and evaluating results, comparisons would not be made among individual students' scores or even of students' scores to national norms. Instead, informed and experienced educators would establish levels of satisfactory performance (known as *criterion levels*). Students' scores would be compared with those levels and judged accordingly.

3. *Selecting Reading Objectives*

   More than 550 Oregonians—including the Oregon Right to Read Advisory Committee, intermediate education district (IED) assessment coordinators and public school educators—participated in the review and selection of 25 important reading objectives delineating skills important for Oregon learners. Those 25 objectives formed the basis for the 1974 pilot test and the 1975 full-scale assessment.

4. *Selecting Test Items*

   Test items measuring the 25 objectives were assembled from existing item collections. Oregon Department of Education staff and members of the Oregon Right to Read Advisory Committee reviewed all items thoroughly, and recommended that 96 be adapted for use on the 1974 pilot test. Following pilot testing, the most effective items were retained; others were modified or replaced. The result was a 94-item test used in the 1975 assessment.

5. *Sampling: Effective Use of Limited Resources*

   In order to make the best use of time and other available resources, the decision was made to test a "sample"—a scientifically selected group of students who, in terms of age, sex, race and a number of other characteristics, were representative of Oregon's total fourth grade student population. Though only one-fourth of Oregon's fourth graders (8,111 students in 206 schools) were actually tested, the results can now be reported as if all Oregon fourth graders had been tested. Sampling provided accurate information efficiently and economically.

6. *Administering the Assessment*

   The first Wednesday in April was designated as the date for statewide assessment. In most sample schools, fourth grade teachers administered the test to their own students. Students provided certain biographical data (age, sex, race, etc.), while teachers provided more descriptive information such as whether the student was bilingual, had ever failed a grade, was participating in a compensatory education program, or was receiving assistance in reading. Answers to these and similar questions enabled reviewers of results to see how well students with given characteristics had performed on the assessment.

7. *Analyzing the Results*

   Because the various audiences for Oregon statewide assessment reports have different needs and interests, assessment data were subjected to several kinds of statistical analysis. These analyses addressed two basic questions:

   - What were the identified characteristics of fourth grade students in the sample?
   - How did students perform on the test?

8. *Reviewing the Results*

   After the data were analyzed, recommendations were made which Oregon educators, parents and others could follow in order to bring about educational improvements. Forty individuals, qualified by virtue of their knowledge and experience, came together from throughout the state to make such recommendations. These 40 teachers, reading specialists, administrators, parents, and other citizens—known collectively as the 1975 interpretive panel—met in Portland in September to review assessment results. They were assisted by staff from the Oregon Department of Education and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

   The significant involvement of parents and educators in interpreting assessment results and recommending appropriate actions is central to the Oregon Statewide Assessment Program, and sets the Oregon program apart from similar programs in most other states.

III. LOOKING AT THE RESULTS

The assessment test administered in April 1975 represented a major step toward identifying existing strengths and weaknesses in Oregon fourth grade students' reading performance. Now, by addressing the weaknesses and working to maintain strengths, educators and other decision makers can take further steps to improve educational opportunities for Oregon students.

Results by Objective

For purposes of this assessment, the 25 objectives selected by Oregon educators and citizens were grouped into four *domains:* word attack, vocabulary, comprehension and application. The table on the opposite page shows how the objectives were categorized.

In order to determine how well Oregon students had performed on the 1975 assessment, it was necessary to establish criterion levels of performance to which actual student performance could be compared. This was a task for the interpretive panel.

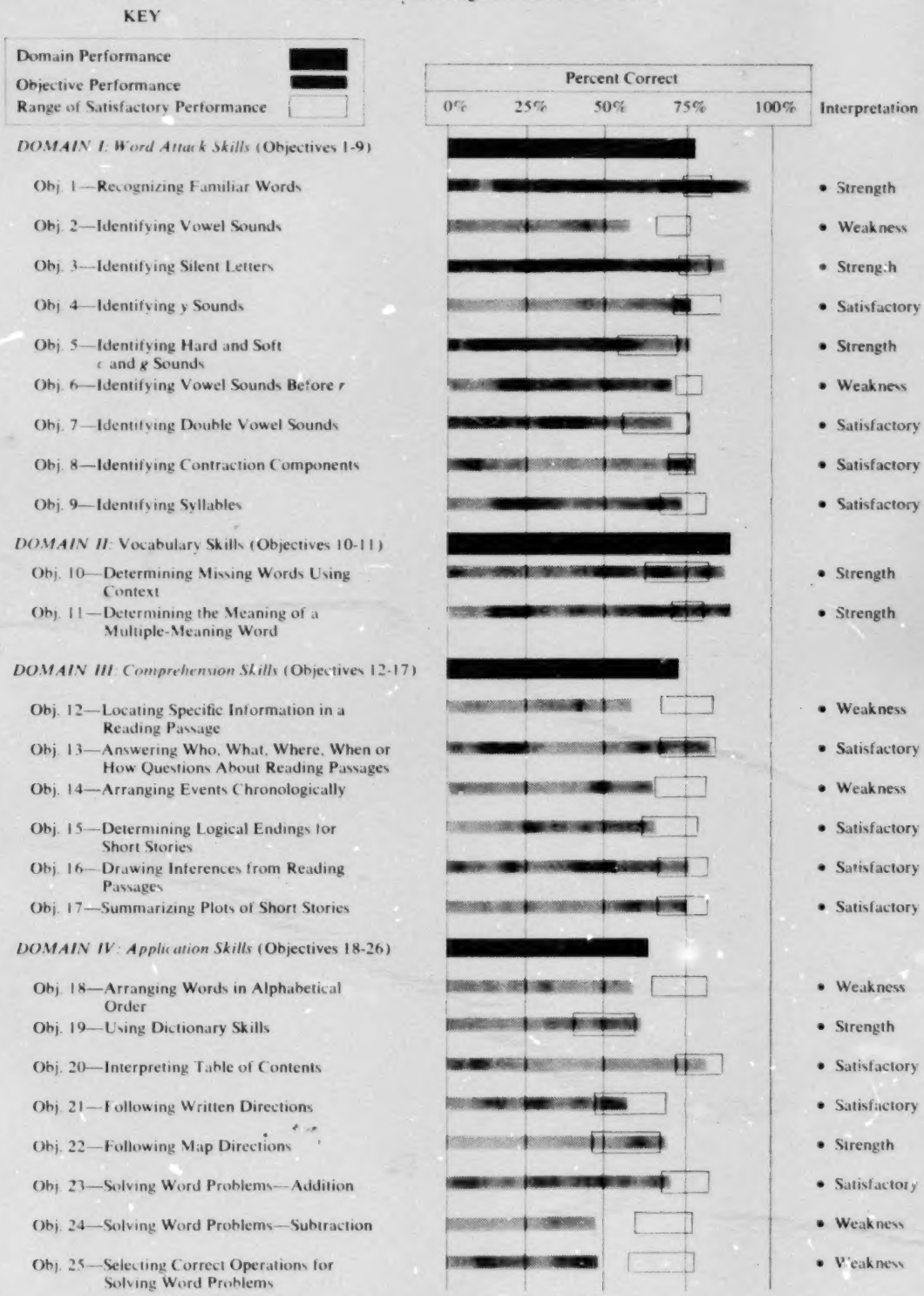
Pooling their knowledge and experience, interpretive panel members set two criterion levels of performance: "desired" and "acceptable." Desired performance represented the percentage of students that interpretive panel members would like to see complete an item correctly—a goal toward which to strive. Acceptable performance represented the minimum percentage of students that panelists felt must complete an item correctly in order for general performance on that item to be considered satisfactory. Performance above the desired level was considered indicative of a strength. Performance below the acceptable level was considered indicative of a weakness. The range from acceptable to desired performance was defined as satisfactory performance.

The ranges of satisfactory performance and actual student performance are presented in the table. Actual student performance by domain (i.e., the average performance on all objectives in that category) is represented by the wide shaded lines. Actual student performance by objective is represented by the narrow shaded lines. And the range of satisfactory performance for each objective is represented by a box.

The table indicates that the range of satisfactory performance on Objective 1 was from about 75 to 85 percent. But, as the table also shows, actual student performance was about 95 percent—well above the satisfactory range, and therefore indicative of a strength. For Objective 2, on the other hand, performance was well below the satisfactory range—and therefore indicative of a weakness.

Of the 25 objectives, student performance was satisfactory on 11, below the satisfactory range (indicating a weakness) on seven, and above the satisfactory range (indicating a strength) on seven.

1975 Reading Assessment
Performance of Oregon Fourth Graders



Results by Student and District Characteristics

Many characteristics—physical or mental, economic or sociological, innate or environmental—relate to student achievement. Information on student performance can be analyzed and interpreted according to various student and district characteristics.

Having examined assessment results by domain and objective, the interpretive panel considered how the following district and student characteristics might relate to student performance:

- Region
- District Size
- District Per Pupil Expenditure
- Need for Corrective/Remedial Work in Reading
- Severity of the Diagnosed Reading Problem
- Participation in a Corrective/Remedial Reading Program
- Participation in a Compensatory Education Program
- Speaking a Second Language
- Repeating a Grade
- Receiving Reading Assistance from Paraprofessionals or Aides
- Amount of Reading Instruction Per Day
- Student's Race/Ethnic Group
- Student's Sex
- Student's Age

Following a careful review of results by these student and district characteristics, and by domain and objective, interpretive panel members cited the following outcomes for the 1975 reading assessment:

- Performance was lower for comprehension and application skills than for word attack and vocabulary skills.
- Student performance was quite consistent throughout the four domains. That is, groups scoring higher in one domain tended to score higher in all four domains.
- Large, metropolitan districts tended to score lower throughout the four domains. However, reviewers felt that differences in district characteristics were less important than the greater differences observed in relation to student characteristics.
- The approximately 6 percent of the fourth grade students who were non-white tended to score lower on the assessment than the white students. These children were more likely to be in Title I ESEA programs, and to be receiving corrective or remedial assistance in reading.
- The greatest student performance variation from the state averages occurred for the following student characteristics: (1) the extent of the student's need for remedial reading services and receipt of such services; (2) whether the student was participating in a Title I ESEA Compensatory Education Program; (3) whether the student had failed a grade or been held back; and (4) the student's race.
- The performance of some bilingual students was well below the state average.
- The student characteristics of sex and age showed a slight but consistent trend across the domains with boys and older children who had failed a grade or been held back scoring lower.

Even though direct comparisons of student performance between 1974 and 1975 are not possible on an objective-by-objective basis, certain general comparisons can be made.

- The percent of students diagnosed as needing corrective or remedial assistance increased from 17.2 percent in 1974 to 22.9 percent in 1975.
- The percent of students *not* receiving needed remedial assistance increased from 4.4 percent to 7.1 percent.
- The percent of students participating in Title I ESEA programs increased from 6.7 percent to 8.2 percent.
- In both the pilot test and the 1975 reading assessment, boys scored lower than girls on most objectives.
- In both the pilot test and the 1975 assessment, students receiving corrective or remedial assistance and students participating in Title I ESEA programs (i.e., students identified as educationally disadvantaged) were the lowest scoring. Performance of such students indicates a need to continue and reinforce remedial and corrective reading programs.

Readers should be cautioned about making additional comparisons between this year's results and the 1974 pilot test results. The method of establishing ranges of satisfactory student performance was changed in 1975, and a number of test items were replaced or modified between 1974 and 1975. This does not suggest that one set of interpretations is more valid than the other, or that identified general similarities in student performance from one year to the next are not accurate.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

In making the following recommendations, interpretive panel members combined their knowledge of performance results with their personal and professional judgment. It is expected—and hoped—that others will have additional recommendations to offer. Readers are encouraged to examine the results for themselves and to compare their conclusions and recommendations with those presented here.

• RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE OREGON LEGISLATURE

1. Approximately 7 percent (2,400) of Oregon's fourth graders have been diagnosed as needing corrective/remedial help—yet they are not receiving it. **Funds should be granted to provide services to these students.**
2. **Seed money should be provided for innovative programs to increase parents' involvement in the education of their children.**
3. **Make resources available for academic diagnosis of all students transferring into one system from another.**

• RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

4. Performance of some groups—e.g., minority students, Title I students, students diagnosed as needing corrective/remedial work—was low on this assessment. In addition, student performance statewide was lower on comprehension and application skills than on word attack and vocabulary skills. **The Oregon Department of Education exemplary program administrators and advisory committees should consider such results in setting priorities for funding proposed reading programs.**
5. **The Department and the Board should use assessment results to assist colleges and universities in designing teacher preparation programs, and to assist the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission in setting professional standards for teacher certification.**
6. **The Department and the Board should use assessment results in providing technical assistance (e.g., on interpretation of test results) and in designing in-service training (e.g., the Right to Read Program) for educators and local districts.**

• RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STATE TEXTBOOK COMMISSION

7. **The State Textbook Commission should continue to consider results of the statewide assessment in its evaluation of textbooks.**

• RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHERS AND DISTRICT PERSONNEL

8. Student performance was high in the areas of word attack and vocabulary skills, but lower in the areas of comprehension and application. **Teachers and district personnel should carefully review textbooks and other reading materials to ensure emphasis on domains and objectives on which performance was lower.**
9. Some minority students and bilingual students performed considerably below the state average. **Teachers and specialists should examine more closely the effectiveness of programs for minority students. In particular, emphasis must be placed on helping minority students, whose native language is not English, develop proficiency in English without diminishing the importance of their native culture. Whenever possible in working with bilingual minority students, English should be taught as part of a bilingual program.**
10. Performance of male, non-white, and Title I ESEA students and those diagnosed as needing corrective/remedial assistance tended to be low. **Teachers and specialists should make a special effort to use materials and exercises which are interesting and relevant to such students.**

• RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARENTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

11. Results show that fourth grade boys, on an average, do not read as well as girls and that performance for all fourth grade students tends to be lowest in the areas of comprehension and application skills. **Based on these results, it is recommended that parents provide their children—particularly boys—a variety of reading activities emphasizing development of comprehension and application skills. In addition, parents should encourage a positive attitude toward reading by demonstrating through their words and actions that they consider reading a valuable and important activity.**

V. REPORTS AND PRODUCTS

The following reports and products present the results of the 1975 Oregon Statewide Reading Assessment:

The *Technical Report* is a comprehensive record of the 1975 assessment prepared primarily for the assessment staff and educational researchers. *Volume I* presents a detailed background and history of the assessment. *Volume II* presents a comprehensive overview of assessment procedures, covering such phases of the 1975 assessment as sampling, collecting data, and analyzing results. *Volume III* presents a complete description of the procedures involved in coordinating the 1975 interpretive panel meetings and a full discussion of the interpretive comments and recommendations offered by that panel.

The *General Report*, a summary of the *Technical Report*, is intended for such audiences as legislators, Department of Education program directors and staff, local district personnel, the general public, and media personnel who would further disseminate the information.

The *Executive Summary*, like the *General Report*, is for a non-technical audience. The most significant findings and recommendations are highlighted in this document.

A brochure provides a quick overview of the 1974-75 Oregon assessment program.

Copies of the *General Report* and *Executive Summary* are available. Write or call:

Documents Clerk
Oregon Department of Education
942 Lancaster Drive N.E.
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Questions about the Oregon Statewide Assessment Program are welcomed and should be sent to:

Director
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Copies of the reading test used in the 1975 assessment are available from the Department for use by any Oregon school district. There is no charge. Requests for copies of the test should be sent to the director of the Oregon Statewide Assessment Program.